

**Amendments to the Claims:**

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions and listing of claims in the application.

Claims 1-21 are amended.

**Listing of Claims:**

1. (Currently Amended) A process for preparing a fertilizer composition, ~~characterized in that it comprises comprising~~ the following steps:  
reacting a humified fossil material, which is selected from the group comprising leonardite, lignite, xylite and peat, in water in the presence of gluconic acid; and  
subsequently adding to the mixture an alkaline agent in such a quantity as to adjust the pH to a basic value.
2. (Currently Amended) A process according to claim 1, ~~characterized in that wherein~~ the quantity of gluconic acid added, expressed as gluconic acid at 50% by weight, is from 3% to 10% by weight relative to the weight of the fossil material.
3. (Currently Amended) A process according to claim 1 ~~or claim 2, characterized in that wherein~~ the alkaline agent is potassium hydroxide or ammonium hydroxide.
4. (Currently Amended) A process according to ~~any one of claims 1 to 3, characterized in that claim 1, wherein~~ the alkaline agent is potassium hydroxide, added at a quantity of from 6% to 15% by weight relative to the weight of the fossil material, said quantity being expressed as potassium hydroxide at from 48-50% by weight.
5. (Currently Amended) A process according to ~~any one of claims 1 to 4, characterized in that claim 1, wherein~~ the gluconic acid is added in such a quantity as to adjust the pH to values of less than 3 and preferably less than 2.5.
6. (Currently Amended) A process according to ~~any one of claims 1 to 5~~ claim 1, wherein step a) is carried out at a temperature not greater than 30°C.

7. (Currently Amended) A process according to ~~any one of claims 1 to 6~~ claim 1, wherein step a) is continued for a time of from 2 to 4 hours with agitation, which is followed by an optional stationary period for a time of from 6 to 12 hours.

8. (Currently Amended) A process according to ~~any one of claims 1 to 7~~ claim 1, wherein, in step b), agitation is continued for a time of from 6 to 12 hours, followed by an optional stationary period of up to 24 hours.

9. (Currently Amended) A process according to ~~any one of claims 1 to 8~~, characterized in that it comprises claim 1, comprising the addition of macronutrient and micronutrient substances to the product of step b).

10. (Currently Amended) A process according to claim 9, characterized in that it comprises comprising the addition of urea in quantities of from 10% to 60% relative to the weight of the fossil material.

11. (Currently Amended) A process according to claim 9 or 10, characterized in that it comprises comprising the addition of plant extracts, in particular extracts of castor beans and lupin seeds.

12. (Currently Amended) A process according to ~~any one of the preceding claims~~ claim 1, wherein the product obtained by step b) is subjected to drying and granulation in order to produce a composition in granular form.

13. (Currently Amended) A process according to claim 12, characterized in that wherein the granular composition is mixed with super-absorbent polymer substances, in particular derivatives of hydrolyzed starch, for preparing a granular composition having a high level of water retention.

14. (Currently Amended) A process according to ~~any one of claims 1 to 9, characterized in that claim 1, wherein~~ the product of step b) is subjected to filtration with separation of the liquid phase which is intended for use as a liquid fertilizer.

15. (Currently Amended) A process according to claim 14, ~~characterized in that wherein~~ the liquid phase obtained by the filtration is supplemented with urea in quantities of from 20% to 60% relative to the weight of the liquid phase.

16. (Currently Amended) A process according to ~~any one of the preceding claims, characterized in that claim 1, wherein~~ the fossil material is a leonardite ore.

17. (Currently Amended) Fertilizer compositions in liquid form, which can be obtained by means of the process according to ~~any one of the claims 1 to 11 and 14 to 16~~ claim 1.

18. (Currently Amended) Fertilizer compositions in granular form, which can be obtained by means of the process according to ~~any one of claims 1 to 13~~ claim 1.

19. (Currently Amended) ~~Use of a~~ A granular composition according to claim 18 wherein the composition is used as a fertilizer, in particular for increasing plant growth.

20. (Currently Amended) ~~Use of a~~ A granular composition according to claim 18 wherein the composition is used in order to increase the fertility of agricultural soils or in order to decontaminate soils polluted by chemical products and/or toxic metal ions.

21. (Currently Amended) ~~Use of a~~ A liquid composition according to claim 17 wherein the composition is used in order to fertilize by localized irrigation and/or by spraying leaves.